



ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN 2003-2005

How have we gotten to this point, and where are we going from here? All of the state's common accountability measures represent different ways of expressing the same efficiency goal: keeping as many undergraduates as possible in school and graduating them in a timely fashion. Because of that, it is expected that most of the common measures will be affected by the same set of activities or initiatives. The Transfer GEI is a little different, and will be addressed separately.

PART I

We have now been watching the outcomes of our work on the state efficiency measures for five years – 1997-98 through 2001-02. During that time, Washington State University has implemented a number of initiatives that were aimed, either wholly or in part, at improving the efficiency with which undergraduates complete their studies at the university.

Because most of the initiatives undertaken by the institution to make the educational experience more efficient accrue over the course of a student's academic career, it is only now, after five years, that we would hope to see improvements that can be attributed to institutional effect. Unfortunately, in this kind of population-based environment, we do not change one variable at a time, nor do we evaluate the effect of one alteration in policy or programming before instituting another. As it is commonly described, we do not move one big lever that can be demonstrated to cause a change (or not cause a change) in a measure. Rather we move multiple small levers, all of which are intended to have a variety of modest effects, which we hope will add up to significant change. If we do not see the kind of change we had hoped for, we will still maintain many earlier efforts, if they can be shown to qualitatively improve the experience of students. Among the wealth of examples of initiatives included in earlier Accountability Plans are the following:

The Degree Audit Review System – DARS (Accountability Plan 1997-99) is now fully online for all students and advisors. It is an extremely useful tool for understanding the current status and remaining requirements of a student's program, as well as their choices for other possible programs. It has, however, proven more complex to use than anticipated, and is undergoing revision and upgrading to make it more user-friendly.

The Four-Year Degree Guarantee (Accountability Plan 1997-99) has not been popular with students and has fallen into nearly complete disuse. It has, however, generated a much more useful and widely used tool, as nearly all undergraduate degree programs now have a four-year course of studies laid out in the catalog itself. These plans are now under review to ensure that they are both current and available for every degree program (or five-year plans for the few programs requiring them).

Tightened course withdrawal (1998-99) and probation and reinstatement (2002-03) policies seem to have had some effect. But has that effect been to eliminate weaker students sooner or to convince students to take academics more seriously? The number of students deficient for two or more semesters is down markedly for each of the past two years. The proportion of the Freshman class deficient their first semester dropped by five percentage points last year, due probably to a combination of better prepared students, intensive learning community programs (e.g., Freshman Seminar, Teniwe), and ever higher attendance at the freshman orientation experience, ALIVE!

Teniwe and Freshman Seminar students, as groups, continue to have combinations of higher freshman to sophomore retention rates, higher freshman grades, fewer deficiencies, and more credit hours completed. Plans to expand both programs to include more of the freshmen class (Accountability Plan 1999-01) have been frustrated by shrinking budgets.

Tutoring Programs and Supplemental Instruction were both mentioned in several earlier plans. Students who use tutoring early and often earn higher subsequent grades than similar gpa students who use tutoring sporadically or not at all. As a group, students in Supplemental Instruction (SI) sections earn higher grades than students in the same classes who do not participate in SI. Again, further expansion of these valuable support systems has been limited by the current budget environment.

Perhaps nowhere in the institution has an accountability measure provided as much good information, and generated as many positive changes, as in the area of transfer articulation. The early data on Transfer GEI compared to Freshman GEI, and in sciences and engineering, in particular, focused a good deal of excellent work on this area across the system, as well as at Washington State University. While nearly all of the efforts to promote retention and graduation efficiency apply to transfer students as well to those who enter as freshmen, transfer students also have different challenges that need different solutions.

The value of the new Associate of Science degree that grew out of the initial system-wide efforts to address this discrepancy is readily apparent to Washington State University's transfer advisors. As these community college graduates have begun to enroll in greater numbers, we see more and more transfer students coming to us better prepared for engineering and science degrees. However, the number of Washington State University graduates who entered with this preparation is still too small to have much effect on the Transfer GEI. We will be analyzing this measure closely over the next few years, and working with the rest of the higher education system to make any adjustments needed to maximize the success of this new associate degree.

The new Washington State University Transfer Center in Pullman (Accountability Plan 1999-01) has succeeded beyond all expectations, with outcomes both anticipated and unanticipated. It has become a well-known place for both prospective and current transfer students to make inquiries through phone calls, e-mails, and drop-in visits. The staff has recently been expanded to include an additional academic advisor and another student assistant. A community college/Washington State University listserv is active in sharing information with CC advisors.

Unexpectedly, the Transfer Center has also become the unit to which all things transfer-related get referred: its staff provides training on transfer topics, they are a presence at meetings, a resource for faculty and staff on campus, and are there at every new student orientation program and anywhere transfer students might be. They have led focus groups for transfer students and, in response, have instituted a transfer mentoring program. They keep abreast of transfer matters across the state and have assumed the responsibility to inform the Washington State University community about new developments.

Electronic tools such as DARS, the Transfer Course Equivalency website, and Cougar TRACS have all added a component to transfer efficiency. With each of these tools students are able to see where they are, and/or to plan for the future, whether it is for community college coursework that will transfer or to make a good semester plan while currently enrolled at Washington State University.

We continue to produce new articulation agreements (Accountability Plan 1997-99), but more slowly, as we focus more attention on system-wide transfer pathways, mostly within existing associate degrees. The WSU-specific agreements are becoming more standardized in wording and format, which makes it easier to create and easier for advisors and students to use. Frequently, these are in degree programs unique to Washington State University such as Human Development, Interior Design, and various agriculture-related degrees.

Our regional recruiters who routinely visit community colleges throughout the state have now been trained to be good at preliminary academic advising so that they can answer specific transfer questions competently. Learning Center staff and other recruiters are also being trained in the basics of transfer. It is already apparent that it is making a big difference in clearing up some of the complexity that seems to surround transfer for many students.

In the past, only freshmen students (up to 30 semester credits) were given mid-term grades in order to signal to them how they were doing before the end of the semester. Not long ago, it was decided that we should give all new students that advantage. So transfer students, until they reach 30 Washington State University credits, will receive mid-term grade reports to assist them in the academic transition.

Beginning this year, we are now able to receive transcript data files electronically from community colleges. While this sounds like a small item, its impact is huge. Early receipt of transfer transcripts allows for the opportunity to evaluate credits prior to the semester of entry, which can save a transfer student both time and credits by eliminating unnecessary duplication of course work. Because transfer students typically apply much later than freshman and their even later-arriving transcripts require individual evaluation, it has been a long term struggle to advise them quickly enough to get all of them registered in the appropriate course work their first semester on campus. Electronic receipt of transcripts considerably speeds up the process across all the Washington State University campuses as completed Transfer Credit Reports are available to advisors sooner.

Both the Vancouver and Tri-Cities campuses, in close collaboration with their local community colleges, have recently developed new approaches for students to move more efficiently through four-year degree programs. Higher retention from the community college to the baccalaureate campus, as well as higher graduation rates and greater student satisfaction are among the expected outcomes.

Finally, we are pleased that, thus far, we continue to be able to offer admission to all qualified transfer students (40 credits; 2.0 gpa), but we are especially pleased that last fall's average transfer gpa was 3.04, a new record for Washington State University. In general, transfer students are applying earlier in the year and with higher gpa's. Given what we know about gpa and time-to-degree, this trend alone will improve the long-term graduation efficiency of transfer students.

It is impossible to attribute changes in the Transfer GEI to any one initiative, but taken together, all of these activities appear to be contributing to a gradual, but persistent, improvement on this measure. Whether or not that proves to be the case in the long run, we know for certain that the experience of many individual transfer students at Washington State University has been better because of these initiatives.

Part II

Turning to Washington State University's plans to address the accountability measures during the 2003-05 biennium, our focus is on two major initiatives. The first is the university's new Strategic Plan; the second will be the work begun in response to Senate Bill 5135.

"Achieving Our Vision: World Class. Face to Face. Strategic Plan 2002 – 2007"

(<http://www.wsu.edu/StrategicPlanning/published-plan.pdf>) is the now completed plan that is guiding the work of the university in the immediate future. On-going Implementation Teams, regular reports from all units of the institution to the Provost and President and from them to the Board of Regents ensures that our efforts remain focused, and that appropriate incentives are in place to engage the entire community in making the Strategic Plan a reality.

Higher education research agrees that retention and graduation rates are most affected by providing an excellent academic experience to prepared and motivated students. The first of the four Goals of the Strategic Plan expresses this truism. All of the sub-goals of the Plan have either been implemented, are in the process of implementation or in the planning stages.

GOAL: Offer the Best Undergraduate Experience in a Research University

Sub goal 1: Attract, recruit, and retain a diverse, high quality student body.

Required actions:

- A. Implement recruitment and admissions strategies that reach and serve high ability students from high schools and community colleges.*
- B. Enforce more stringent retention standards.*
- C. Establish realistic enrollment targets that make clear we are striving to recruit the best students, not the most students.*
- D. Focus, coordinate, and integrate student recruitment and articulation efforts.*
- E. Develop and implement scholarship programs to attract high ability students.*
- F. Foster opportunities for study, internships, and experiential learning abroad to attract high quality students.*
- G. Make certain that all constituencies, including potential students, are aware of our institutional commitment to quality education.*
- H. Support outreach, recruitment, and retention programs that improve the diversity of our student body.*

In 1996, Astin reported that of college students with a high school gpa of C or less and SAT less than 700, just over 10% graduated in 4 years, while 84% of students with high school gpa of A or A+ and SAT scores of 1300 or more graduated in four years. Our own data also shows that once students at Washington State University are deficient, they have only a 20% chance of graduating, but if reinstated they persist for an average of two more years before dropping out entirely. We believe that establishing high expectations for student preparation and motivation will provide better information to students and their parents about the demands of college level

work, and will encourage students to live up to those expectations. To that end, all of the “Required Actions” under Sub goal 1 have been implemented.

Sub goal 2: Create an academic culture that promotes and rewards one-on-one faculty-to-student and student-to-student interactions.

Required actions:

- A. Recognize and reward faculty and staff for exemplary teaching, advising, mentoring, and leading.*
- B. Provide opportunities for more out-of-class interaction between students and faculty.*
- C. Provide increased opportunities for undergraduates to be exposed to "hands-on" research.*
- D. Provide increased opportunities for peer-to-peer faculty development and support programs that show promise for enhancing learning.*
- E. Work to more fully integrate diverse students and scholars, both domestic and international, within the University community.*

Once a well-prepared student body has been admitted, one challenge is to provide them with an academic experience that brings them into meaningful contact with the university’s world class faculty and with each other. The second sub-goal is being implemented in a number of ways, largely college by college. For example, the College of Liberal Arts is re-directing resources to support departmental programs that integrate comprehensive research experience with coursework. The College of Agriculture and Home Economics has expanded its research opportunities to include 489 undergraduates last year. The College of Business and Economics promoted accountability and excellence among faculty through new promotion and tenure and performance appraisal processes.

Sub goal 3: Continually improve the quality of our program offerings and their delivery.

Required actions:

A. Establish an Office of Undergraduate Education (OUE) whose objective will be to provide coordination of university-wide aspects of undergraduate education and to promote continuous improvement in the undergraduate experience.

B. Create learning communities and continuously evaluate their effectiveness in enhancing the undergraduate experience.

C. Encourage and fund curricular innovations, including collaborative and interdisciplinary approaches that improve the quality of our offerings.

D. Infuse international content into curricula to prepare citizens to become effective participants in the global economy and in an increasingly diverse and multicultural society, and provide incentives to units and individuals to achieve this goal.

E. Align capital development priorities to support top-flight undergraduate curricular and extracurricular programs.

F. Include general education in regular cycle of program review with the goal of continuous improvement.

G. Evaluate the costs and benefits of alternative delivery methods and techniques utilized in producing higher education; undertake in-depth and high-level analysis of the benefits, impact, and cost of distance education delivery.

H. Promote dialog on methods and outcomes of instruction.

I. Determine where technology can efficiently, and usefully, enhance the educational process and implement these enhancements.

J. Help faculty members understand where technology will make their teaching more effective.

One of the central tenets of the Strategic Plan is continuous attention to the quality of all academic programs, including the faculty, the content, the pedagogy and the technology involved. For example, the new Office of Undergraduate Education is currently being implemented, although separate administration for it will await a better budget situation. A total of \$300,000 in Undergraduate Teaching and Learning Improvement Grants was awarded during 2002-03 to 14 faculty members and departments in a new, annual initiative to focus attention on pedagogy and assessment. The College of Engineering and Architecture has instituted a new Teniwe (learning community) program, in which 75 new freshmen take all pre-engineering courses as a cohort and live near each other on campus.

Sub goal 4: Provide student advising and mentoring that empowers students to complete their programs of study, improves retention, increases student satisfaction, and bolsters academic achievement.

Required actions:

A. Reward undergraduate advising and mentoring.

- B. Communicate to students their shared responsibility in the planning and timely completion of their academic program.*
- C. Require each department or program to maintain formal advising policies and procedures*

Advising is a perennial issue at almost every institution nationwide. Washington State University is concentrating on this area as one of four major sub-goals in its Strategic Plan in order to focus on it the attention required to generate good, long-term solutions. Every department or program is re-evaluating and articulating its advising policies and procedures. As only one example, The College of Liberal Arts is developing, for the first time, an advising center with professional advisors, as well as initiating a system to utilize and reward senior faculty for advising and mentoring as part of their contracted activities. The College of Sciences has completely restructured its Advising Center to make it both more effective for students and more efficient for staff.

In sum, Washington State University believes that by providing the highest quality academic experience we can offer, to the best prepared students we can attract, we will, as an inevitable side-effect, fulfill the expectations for efficiency, as well.

Nevertheless, in addition to the ongoing work to implement the Strategic Plan, a new **Student Academic Progress Task Force** has recently been appointed to implement the terms of Senate Bill 5135. The following charge to the Task Force expresses both the legislative intent and the expectations of the institution. The Task Force is directed to:

- 1) Develop policies that ensure undergraduate students enrolled in degree or certificate programs complete their programs in a timely manner;*
- 2) Address students who accumulate more than 125% of the number of credits required to complete their degree; who drop more than 25% of their course load during a term; or remain on probation for more than one term;*
- 3) Report to the HECB by January 30, 2004 on the policies developed and on the number and characteristics of students affected; and*
- 4) Describe in the report policies developed and actions taken to eliminate barriers (such as overenrolled courses) to timely completion of degree programs.*

In pursuing its work, the Task Force will identify priorities and recommendations that will directly promote the goals of our own Strategic Plan and the best interests of our undergraduate students. Our goal is to help students not only to succeed at Washington State University, but to fulfill their own educational goals, and to do it in a timely fashion that allows greater access for additional students.

While activities already in progress will continue, Washington State University anticipates that the strategies devised within the next few months by the Student Academic Progress Task Force may also assist toward progress on all of the state efficiency measures over the 2003-05 biennium.

Finally, we would like to re-affirm from our previous plan that, "Student learning is a central mission of the institution, and we are committed to assessing and improving our success in generating that outcome". To that end we continue to contribute, both internally and in concert

with the other public baccalaureate institutions, to the development of the statewide assessment of student learning outcomes in Writing, Information and Technology Literacy, Quantitative Reasoning, and Critical Thinking.

After reviewing the Washington State University data on the common efficiency measures through 2001-02, we have proposed challenging intermediate targets on all of the measures (Table I). Establishing internal measures and benchmarks to evaluate the successful implementation of the Washington State University Strategic Plan is underway, but not yet complete. In the next Accountability Plan, we will propose replacing the existing institution-specific measures with an appropriate set of measures more closely related to our current institutional priorities.

Table I. Washington State University Accountability Measures			Proposed New WSU 03 - 05 Target	Long-term state performance goal
Common Measures	95 – 96 Baseline	01-02 Performance		
Graduation Efficiency Index				
a. Freshmen	89.58	89.9%	90.0	95
b. Transfers	79.83	83.0%	85.0	90
Undergraduate Retention (Overall)	84.6	86.1%	88.0	95
Freshman Retention	82.7	82.9%	85.0	90
5-Year Freshman Graduate Rate	55.7	53.8%	56.0	65
Institution-Specific Measures				
Faculty Productivity				
a. Student Credit Hours/Faculty FTE	197.1	213.6	215.0	
b. Individualized Enrollment/Faculty	3.8	3.8	4.0	
c. Research and Scholarship	79.3	84.4%	85.0	
Technology for Learning				
a. Distance Student Credit Hours	17,211	47,306	Met	
b. Degree Programs via Distance	3	11	12	
c. Reengineered Courses	7	758	Met	
d. Classrooms with Technology	42.41	72.9%	80.0	

What the Measures Mean

Freshman Retention: WSU has set a target for Freshman Retention, while continuing to report Overall Retention, as well.

Individualized Enrollment/Faculty: The amount of work faculty do with students in supervising undergraduate research, internships, senior theses, private lessons, and independent studies. (Tends to rise and fall with the size of the junior/senior classes.)

Student Credit Hours per Faculty FTE: Number of credit hours generated per instructional faculty FTE. (Tends to rise and fall with the size of the freshman/sophomore classes.)

Research and Scholarship: Percent of faculty completing the expected amount and type of scholarship during the past year, based on college by college definition.

Distance Student Credit Hours: Credit hours earned through interactive video courses, videotape courses, online courses and multiple mode courses.

Degree Programs via Distance: Number of degree programs offered away from any WSU campus, and primarily through electronic media such as interactive video, on-line courses, etc.

Reengineered Courses: Number of courses taught “primarily” by electronic means, including WHETS, online, e-mail, videoconference, etc., per PCHEES definitions.

Classrooms with Technology: Percent of University classrooms equipped to support technology-intensive teaching. As before, progress will depend, in part, on the availability of the capital budget for such purposes.